

TWO POEMS AFTER FRANCIS PONGE



Michael Foley

DUVET

Millions of feathers—and the younger the better—make an
empty bag buoyant with vital ... *élan*.
But America, experienced in the packaging of bubbles, thought
of dividing the bag in compartments to keep the
expansiveness in check.
Now whoever lies beneath can see beyond his own nose (an abil-
ity we're not often anxious to use).
Bedecked in the plumage of plucked birds, we curl up without
the least trace of remorse.
The compartments at least should be opened up. Freedom of
movement for feathers! (I for one have no wish to see past my
nose.)
The feathers I'd like to see though. *Why aren't duvets transparent?*
Because the clever marketing people have no imagination really.
Feathers—adornment, lightness, flying: profoundly congenial
associations in a lightweight age.
For instead of the former illusion of substance we need the illu-
sion of airiness.
No more burdens or bindings. Protection without restraint.
Warmth without weight.
And gone with rough blankets those ponderous chests of draw-
ers, wardrobes and patterned dark walls.
In their place airy spaciousness in whisper grey, lady blush, pale
orchid, mountain mist. "Heavy" means "threatening" now.
Lightness is all.
So why do I lie late beneath my light duvet with something
immovable and dense in my soul?
Too soon for the Irish this weightlessness (Guinness Light failed
to take off). We remember the clabber that clings to the boots.
We remember the suck of the avid earth.
And this house where I lie is not flying but swiftly subsiding in
treacherous clay.

When the loss-adjuster sent me a builder from Galway I knew it
 was Destiny, I knew it was Fate.
 Though I thought a "trial hole" would be a scientific thing,
 gleaming tubes gliding in with hypodermic-like ease, scarcely
 breaking the surface at all.
 It took a pit big enough for him to stand in and shovel heavy
 sour yellowish filth. *Where der's muck der's shit* he said and
 grinned
 As though only too happy to renew his acquaintance with an old
 friend the cities would love to expel.
 Later I pressed him for explanations. Shovelling extra sugar into
 his tea, he gave me a shrewd assessing peer.
 Then he laughed and marked a line across his huge neck: *I only
 work from here down.*

THE WASP

The wasp seems to have adopted on a permanent basis
 The derangement and frenzy of flies in a crisis
 (E.g., zapped by fly spray or stuck to fly paper).
 No, it's even more crazy—hyperactive, inordinate, raging
 The twin antennae always flailing, ponderous abdomen
 oscillating
 Both its pairs of wings restlessly whirring even on a tabletop
 walk.

And its constant intimidating sizzle
 —Like electrical equipment that's developed a fault
 Or a searing hot Balti dish straight from high flame.

Only crushing it to pulp makes it calm.
 For cut it in two and the halves will still jive
 Like a pair of adolescents at an all-night rave.
 If anything the movement more frenetic and wild.
 Too demented to notice its own demise.

Garish colours, provocative hovering, noise
 —As with chauvinists of once-powerful now minor states
 Who perpetually seethe with rage and hate

Determine to give and take only offence
Flaunt insignia, swarm in dark nests... adore beer.

Other wasp passions: Coke, sugared food
... And the honey it can't itself produce.
(Hence a fascinating seminar topic:
Has Anger Always a Sweet Tooth?)

Most revealing is its love-hate relationship with fruit.
It loathes but haunts lusciousness, ripening
The *satori* of developing in silence and peace
That maturity and serenity it can never achieve.

Observe a wasp root in the juicy softness
With a gleaming metallic proboscis
Hairy thorax and maleficent abdomen throbbing.
This is not nourishment but pillage and rape.
It intends to despoil and contaminate.
(Birds attack too but leave a clean wound.
They would never use chemical weapons on fruit.)

Triumphant, it lifts blank obsidian eyes
And four bright yellow daubs on a mask of high gloss.
Aggression loves sun colours rampant on black.
The sun is implacable, fierce, absolute.
But even the hottest of summers grows cool.
Then the wasp is confused—at its most dangerous.
Any contact at all and its sting lashes out.

As though it can sense that its days are few
That it missed the unique assignation with beauty
And its buzzings and blazons are not signs of strength
(You don't have to pretend to be what you are)
But reveal to the world as it briefly sidesteps
Only isolation emptiness inadequacy and fear.

THREE POEMS



István Vörös

THE WAY OF MILK

A drop of milk is dripping
to the ground, under the bed
on which a long-haired woman
is breast-feeding. The floor
cracks with a hiss, like a snake
slithering between floorboards.
The drops falls into the crack
and begins to push the furniture
in the flat below, separating
all the pieces to the left or right.
Two buzz saws spin between them,
one white, one black. The house
is splitting and multiplying,
all that is one wants to be two.
Whoever notices the black saw
will start to grow a beard,
and his fingernails will blacken,
his hair go white. The street
and the neighbourhood will split
in two, and into the chasm
water will run, and gas
from the city will bubble
up through the water.
Whoever notices the white one
will find fruit in his pocket
and a letter in his mailbox.
The city will break in half
like a communion wafer,
and between the two sides
the rough hand of the sea
will slide. On one shore
the sea will fling a fish,
and on the other an empty shell.